1:Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
SR8 Bush Negroes SR8
Saramacca

609 "The whites have wars against each other. . . ,"
203 "Our ancestors. . ."
648 Before the last speaker could finish, a man broke in with a prayer. His voice was conversational and sounded as though he were addressing someone present.

"Great Sky God,
Kediamo, Kediampon,
Mother of the River,
Sacred ancestors,
Grant that if the white man comes for evil
His race end.
Grant that if the white woman comes for evil
Her womb wither, her line perish."

609 But the Loango headman shook his head and said, "The
203 gods will deal with them, have no fear. Do you remember
648 the man who was drowned at the Mamadam, and the one
776 who died way beyond the Granman's country, and that other one, the soldier? They came with evil in their hearts. The gods killed them. The gods will deal with these, too."

And another said: "Let them go up the river. The gods know all. The ancestors know all. This is our land, and our earth spirits will protect us, and they will kill our enemies. This is our river. Our river gods will protect us, and kill our enemies. This is our bush. The gods of the bush are strong. The gods of the bush know their bush children. They know their children's enemies."

Then the Loango elder spoke again: "We have the gods
●[186] from Africa. They are more than all gods. The African gods know all. They will watch over us. We have the obia spirits, the African obia spirits. Mati, friends, let them go up the river. Have no fear. Our gods are with us."

The men's soft, sober voices spoke the words without emotion. Theirs were the voices of destiny. Well might the answering chorus intone the affirmations, while the colloquy went on of leader and chorus, leader and chorus, now one taking up the main theme, now another. To us the cadenced speech came floating softly on the still air.

1: Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
SR8 Bush Negroes SR8
Saramacca

the uncleared bush, or the sight of a snake twined about a liana, no longer struck terror, and the flaying rains which came down so suddenly, and as suddenly were over, no longer even aroused uneasiness.

At the prow of our boat Bayo poled vigorously and continued his countless variants of the seketi song we had been hearing everywhere on the river, while Bibifo had made a refrain of our question, "How do you say this in your Saramacca language?" He would paddle in silence for a long time, only to begin muttering at the most unexpected moments, "Sa'macca tongo!" in the way of an old man who talks to himself. He would then repeat it over and over in ridicule of us, and sometimes in a singsong voice he would improvise lines about the white man who wanted to know how everything was called in the true, true Saramacca language, and how all that was told him he wrote down in a book.

"Great-grandfather," we would say to him, "why do you say this? Isn't it all right for us to want to learn how to talk to the G'aman?"

"*Kere-kere*—It's all right."

But having said this, he would engage Bayo in conversation, clipping his words, and using so much idiom and parable as utterly to confound us.

"Your language is difficult, great-grandfather."

"Ya-hai, it is meant for the people of the bush, white man," he would say with a pride we had not looked for from the mild Bibifo, who was now called Adrian. There was, it appeared, potency in the "word," and magic. The names for things, and the things themselves were one. The knowledge of Saramacca names belonged to the Saramacca people, and whether as Bibifo or Adrian, he was above all a Saramacca Negro, and a member of an important clan.

2

When we had been seven days on the river, our cook came to us and said he wanted to talk about something we had best know.

1: Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
SR8 Bush Negroes SR8
Saramacca

open shelter, covered by a gabled thatch. At both sides the eaves extended several feet from the posts which supported the roof, and almost touched the ground. The floor was of red clay, hardened and smooth. There were no stools about, and no other decorations. Men summoned to a council came with their own council benches. About two of the slender posts which faced the path were obias made of twined native sisal, of narrow strips of blue and red cotton, and cowrie shells. Each differed a little from the other, and each had its own potency, but what this was, none would say. On one of the crosspieces below the eaves were large balls of hardened red clay. They had been put there by the old women to await the time for molding the clay into the obia pots, which, after they had been fired, would be blackened with the soot of rice hulls and oil and refired.

Against the crossbeams in one corner of the council house the women had gathered, and at the other end the men were seated on their stools, with Captain And'u and the bassia, the man second in command, among them. While the men were discussing the Neng'e Nana, their Negro grandfathers from Africa, the women were addressing some direct questions to the white woman.

Why was she not smoking a pipe, as fitted the position of a woman of rank who was on her way to visit the Granman? What had she done with her children when she went on this long journey which took twenty-one nights and days to reach the Suriname white man's city? Did she like her husband's other wife? Had she more children than the other wife? What rank would her sons inherit from their uncles?

"How many gods have you?" one of the younger women asked.

"I have four—three Vodu, and one Apuku," another said, as though the question had been put to her, and she could say with pride that she had three snake gods, and one bush god.

The bassia's handsome wife, who had overheard the men speak of the white man's book which showed pictures of their ancestors, said, "The whites read out of books. The

1:Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
SR8 Bush Negroes SR8
Saramacca

gods do not come to them." There was in her voice contempt for women who had no gods. She was of a reddish-brown color, taller and more slender than most, and the great coils of brass about her arms and ankles told that her beauty had had full recognition. These had come to her at marriage, as had the small earrings of gold which the bassia had brought to her from French Guiana. With these, too, had come cloths and handkerchiefs, beads and carvings.

If white women had no gods, did they know any of the other things which women must know? Did the white woman wear an apron underneath all her cloths, as women should? Were her thighs cicatrized? Did she cook for her husband, or other men, when she should be isolated in the special house provided for women's monthly visits? Did she purify herself with sacred clay when she emerged from isolation in order not to spoil her husband's obias, for which contact with a woman who has her menses is the deadliest taboo? Why, having borne children, did her figure not show it?

"Have you drums?" the bassia's wife asked. "Without drums, how do you pray? How do you dance?"

Dancing without drums availed nothing.

"White women have no gods. The gods do not come to them. They are not troubled by the need to dance. White women do not pray," she concluded, seeing that what dancing the white woman did could only be a feeble affair.

"I will send my son to your country. The men who go to the French shore say it is good to know how to count the white man's way. My woman-child I will never send," she finished with finality.

Now it was the white woman's turn to ask a few questions, having done explaining how her boots laced, and why it was that she was dressed very much as her husband was dressed.

The white clay in the hair and on the face of a small child was medicine. The child's mother had washed for her god that morning. He was a god whose day for dancing was Wednesday, and now, feeling the god stir in her, she would

1:Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
SR8 Bush Negroes SR8
Saramacca

774 at the time approaching a state of possession, had provoked great anger.

"If you do not know what the Dyo-dyo is, then you are not human. Then I won't talk to you. Have you never walked and felt something in back of you, yet nothing was there? Have you never had a dream?"

The Dyo-dyo was one of two souls with which each individual was born, the old woman had later been persuaded to explain, for each man had his akra, his personal soul, which if he were mindful of it, remained with him, and allowed no evil to come to him; and each man had his [795] Dyo-dyo, his wandering soul. At death the soul which had wandered came back to the body. If it were permitted to stray once more, this soul, which had been ever restless in life, would wander about troubling the living.

796 765 But now, sitting among the women in back of the Granman's shrine, it seemed again best to admit that she knew nothing of the adyo ceremony. Fortunately, there was no outburst of anger this time, for here in the true, true Saramacca country, it was soon evident that there was a [186] pride in their magic, and their language, because these were held to be uniquely their own.

"We give a big play for the breaking of mourning." All [534] the drums were played, and the rattles sounded, and the *kwakwa*—the hard-wood bench played with two sticks—was beaten.

[293] For this important ceremony, the oldest living brother of the dead man provided food and rum, and, when the time came to partake of this food, he and the *kei mundu*—the people of rank—sat about the doorway of the widow's house. She herself stood inside the house, behind the threshold, scattering food for the dead, and pouring rum on the [269] ground. Rice and peanuts and sugar cane were thrown away, but not yams or plantains, for those things were not given in their village to the ancestral spirits. As the widow "threw away" the food she wept. In the clearing those who did not eat danced adyo. In a circle, men and women danced in close file, one behind the other, each

1:Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
SR8 Bush Negroes SR8
Saramacca

REBEL DESTINY

3

643 159 186 178 "Tell me this," said Granman Yankuso to us one evening when we sat alone with him in the council house, "why is it that things have changed so in the city? I am not a young man. For years I came to the city, and when I met Negro women of the town going to market or coming from market, they were dressed in full skirts. They looked well. Now the women dress in straight dresses like men. Straight up and down and short. They want to look like white people.

"Years ago when I came to the city, I used to hear Negroes laugh. It is good to hear laughter. Now they are trying to be like the whites. They do not laugh. That is not good. It would be better if white people laughed more, too.

"Why do Negroes want to turn into white people? Look, is my skin like yours? Is my daughter's hair like yours, white woman? If you put on a pangi, you will not look like my daughter. You, white man, are as tall as Captain And'u. If you put on a cloth over one shoulder, you will not look like And'u. . . .

"A man came to me in the city and said he wanted to go to Dahomey. He wore no obias. He was a white man's Negro. I said he couldn't go to Dahomey. The man said, 'Look, my skin is as black as yours.' 'Ai, but your heart isn't.'

"You know why I said it? There is your kind of magic, white man, and there is our kind of magic. White man's magic keeps men in cities, but here in the bush a man needs black man's magic to keep alive and black man's strength to go up and down the rivers.

"You white men have books. You read in books, and you know. I cannot read what men write, yet I can read in my own way. I meet a man, and I can read him. I look at him, and I know what he is thinking. Before he begins to talk, I know what he wants to say. What your ancestors knew they put down in books, and you read it. What our ancestors know, they tell us at night, they tell us in the cool of the

1: Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
SR8 Bush Negroes SR8
Saramacca

morning, they tell us when we call on them. That is the black man's way.

"You white people have money, you have fine houses, you wear clothes, you can count. They tell me that you say in your books all people must be friends. But you have wars. If white people kill white people, then *mati*—friend—how will it be with black people living among the whites?"

Granman Yankuso rose, when he said this, and took from the chains of the suspended lamp a folded envelope. He handed it to us, and from it we took out a letter on the stationery of the League of Nations, signed by its Secretary, Sir Eric Drummond. As we were reading this, he left the council house and soon returned with a larger envelope, which he had kept uncreased, and from it brought out a photograph of the Council of the League of Nations in session. They were his proud possessions. While the World War lasted there was no work for the Bush Negroes on the river. They could not earn the money they needed to buy cloths for marrying and powder and rum for ceremonial usage. The Bush Negroes called it a "great money famine," in the way of their Anansi stories which so often began with "This was a time of great famine." Through a missionary on the upper river, the Granman learned of the war, and through him later of the League, which the missionary had undoubtedly brought up as the white man's defense against the challenge of the black tribal head, who asked, "How will it be with black people living among the whites?"

It was then that the Granman through this same missionary addressed himself to the white rulers far away, telling of the fear of the blacks, and counseling them the wisdom of peace!

4

In the council house Granman Moana Yankuso was host to the Gankwe men. They were there to take their leave of him before starting down river. Asikanu, the handsome brother of the Gankwe clan head, who was sent away from his village while the elders were deciding upon his adultery

1: Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
SR8 Bush Negroes SR8
Saramacca

with the white curtain hanging against the wall of the council house. To one side was the image of the Sky God, tall almost as the big bush which stood about the clearing, and beside it the pole for the Earth Mother. People went from one side of the improvised screen to the other, with no mental image to tell them where they should look or what they might expect to see. Something of fear went with their expectancy.

The Granman nodded, and the pictures began to appear.

"Mati, did you see how they lay the fire?"

"Mother of all Negroes, what great breasts the women have!"

"See them getting the cassava ready! Look, they use the bark for a container!"

"Master Nigger! They know something there in the land of our ancestors. Men know how to weave cloth!"

"See the braids. They are handsome in our ancestral land. The head looks like a carved calabash!"

"Massa Nengere! That's the way to take lumber down! Not one raft at a time, or two, mati. Four at a time. They are workmen there, I tell you! Our ancestors used to say there was wealth there!"

We had usually to tell them what the picture showed, for they had not the habit of looking at these images and would stand to one side, or bend low and look up at the screen. But once we named the picture—"This is the head of a woman," or "This is timber going down to the city," or "This is a path through the bush"—then it was they who began to describe aloud what they saw, exclaiming over the resemblance to their own paths, or to their own manner of burning pots, or to their own way of preparing food.

"Mati, friends," said the Granman, "here deep in the Saramacca bush, all this has come to us. If I were a young man, I would go and see what goes on in the world. I would go to Africa. White man, how much gold does a man need to go to Africa?" After a short silence, he continued this train of thought. "What shall be done? Shall we go see the world?

1:Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
SR8 Bush Negroes SR8
Saramacca

Here is our bush. Our gods are here, and our ancestors come at our call. There is the world—*na g'on tapu*. There is the land of our old ancestors."

He stopped and covered his face with his hands, remaining deep in thought. But when he spoke again, his voice was calm.

"Mati, let us see all that the white man has brought. Here deep in the bush, all this has come to us that even children might see. Let us see all."

On the screen appeared a priest. He wore a grass skirt used in a sacred dance, a skirt like the one we had had made for us here on the river, and his face was covered, mask-like, with white clay.

"Ai, mati," exclaimed the Granman, as everyone gasped at what they saw.

The next picture showed the same priest dancing. Two men held his arms.

"When Kromanti gets a man in the ancestral country, it comes so strong that he has to be held in check, friends. So it is here, too."

9

So great was the fascination of the Granman and of all his people with the phonograph that many times we had occasion to feel if it were not for Apanto's curse, and the habit of elastic to stretch, and of glue to be affected by tropical heat, the machine would have overcome for us what distrust there was of our interest in their beliefs—that it might even have changed the decision of the ancestors when they were consulted by priests in Dahomey—a decision which ruled that the white man and his woman were not to be given the secrets of their worship.

Whatever the ancestors had told the men who carried on their heads the sacred plank which was used for consulting the ancestral will, the attitude of the people showed that the white man could not be received in the bush without distrust. The intentions of a white man might be friendly,

2:Kahn D-5 (1922-1930) 1931
SR8 Bush Negroes SR8

happened to cover a fraction of the Djuka territory, so familiar to Dr. Kahn.

We lived for a time at the Djuka village of Moengo Tappo, and from there visited other villages on neighbouring rivers and creeks. And there I felt again the sharp contrast between the primitive and the civilized. Through the Djukas, I saw civilization in perspective; and especially I saw that tragic phase of it which passes through prison gates.

Djuka life makes us stop to think all over again about everything. It makes us see what we have gained, as well as what we have lost.

There is, for example, no nonsense about white superiority among the Djukas. They are proud to the point of savage arrogance. Hatred and distrust of the white man are as much a part of their inheritance as is their jungle lore. As among the Negroes of Haiti, you must win your way. But when you are finally accepted, not as a superior being, but as an equal, then how warm and charming a thing their friendship is!

The Djuka farewell to us is a beautiful memory. As we passed down the river, between walls of forest where orchids were in gorgeous blossom, the Djuka villagers came down to the water's edge to say good-bye, raising their hands high and bowing low to bring down blessings upon us.

Indirectly it was these Djukas who introduced me to Dr. Kahn. At the time that we were in the Guiana forest Dr. Kahn was in another part of the same jungle, though neither of us knew of the presence or the existence of the other. Later, after our return to New York, our common interest in the

[H5 1/A 532]

Chapter Six

FOOD IN THE JUNGLE

THE Bush Negroes investigate our equipment with great delight, and are much amused by our table manners. They gather around and comment on the food. Often they pick up an empty can discarded by Bundle, the cook, and wrinkle their noses in disgust at the smell of it. They seem to prefer their own food. 643 186

1/A [For caption, see category 116, p. 204. - Analyst]

/31 cont./

202 be mentioned in particular the man who caused so much of a stir,
648 Broos, chief of a camp of persons in hiding behind the plantation Rac a Rac, who came back followed by many.

I must confess that I have never seen this chief and was not involved in this event in any way; the question is, however, whether this Broos and his followers came back of their own accord, or whether they returned without fear of the Whites because of the reassuring signs set up at my request.

That the Bush Negroes attached to me complied with my request by the placing of /32/ signs is not to be doubted, but what outcome resulted from it cannot be said with certainty.

Chapter XXII

Deception Practiced toward Them

114 I said a few words in Chapter XX and earlier about the
648 deceptions that the Whites practiced with regard to the Bush Negroes. I was at first diffident about communicating the unvarnished truth about this. Since, however, this is not reported by me as being generally applicable, because, as in all things, here, too, favorable exceptions exist, I therefore regard it as my duty to make my experience known.

186 The Bush Negroes, it cannot be denied, as the result
648 of the manifold deceptions that they have experienced from the Europeans and other free inhabitants of this colony, have developed an aversion toward them. They therefore oppose deception with deception, and trick with trick.

439 It has become apparent to me that many of them, when
648 they arrive with timber rafts at the plantations in order to sell the timber, after having been deceived several times, make use of all kinds of tricks in order in their turn to deceive the Europeans. I leave now to one side the question as to which of the two parties is the principal or initiating cause and has the greater responsibility in these fraudulent transactions. When a family of Bush Negroes

/33 cont./

439 When, for instance, the Bush Negro has cut down a
437 tree deep in the forest and discovers that it is almost hollow on
313 the inside, then he works it, this defect notwithstanding, into a
186 squared log, taking care to make the visible cavities above and below invisible by hammering wooden pins into it. After that he takes clay and mud and is able to make every trace disappear, a fraud which is thus rarely discovered before a piece is sawed off the log.

Also they practice a great deal of deception by unloading on the buyer as good stuff various qualities of timber of great and little value, but which resemble each other, for instance, by selling a low quality black kabbes (1) for brown hardwood (2),

1. Andira retusa H. B. K.

2. Andira called wassila among the Arrawakken /Arawak/ Indians.

two varieties which can be distinguished only by timber experts.

/34/ If they have worked timber that on one side is already somewhat rotten, or is worm-eaten or split, then they know how to place it in such a way in their rafts that the good side lies upward, a deception that can be discovered only when it has been hauled ashore and one becomes aware of it by turning each piece around and inspecting it carefully.

186 If it is possible to steal something from the Whites,
648 they will not fail to do so. They are also guilty of lying and give themselves the names of those who still possess the confidence of the Whites, which they can do with impunity because the similarity of their coloring and facial features makes it extremely difficult for the Whites to recognize them after an absence.

[829] This repeated trickery has accordingly made the Whites declare them to be scoundrels and liars, but the Bush Negroes, although they do not do so openly, say the same of them and
577 regard themselves as much more trustworthy and honest. That they do this with some appearance of justice cannot be denied; after

/294 cont./

418 It seems that in these relations, both bring more patience and tolerance to bear than toward the people of their own group. It is excessively rare to see disputes arise between Indians and Boni, when there sometimes are some within each group.

•186 The feelings which the Boni have toward the Indians are complex: they feel superior in physical strength, effectiveness, and organization; they make fun of the Indians' puerile eagerness for beads and jewelry, of the begging attitude of certain
829 ones among them. But they admire them for their cleverness, their intimate knowledge of the forest, and fear them for the supernatural powers they attribute to them. Sure of themselves, fearing nothing from the bush, never getting lost, unrivalled hunters and fishermen, the Indians appear to them to be endowed with unique faculties which other men do not possess. We have happened to hear in camp reflections such as this: "It is going to rain, the Indians are making shacks."

829 The Boni feel an intense fear of Indian magic. Not one
152 of them would dare to seriously displease an Indian, and even if he feels he has been wronged, in most cases he will not dare complain (1).

761
787
829

1. In the search for the magic causes of death, it happens that divination may incriminate the action of an Indian medicine man. In such a case the legal action of the Boni is extinguished, for the principle is that the Indian medicine man does not hurt anyone without a reason. It is considered that the deceased must have gravely injured him and that he deserved his fate.

/296 cont./

648 So relations between the Europeans and Refugee Blacks have nothing in common with what one observes in Africa: one notes their faults without indulgence, but one admires them for their strong personality, their art, and their techniques, and one bears an esteem for them which is not feigned.

829 The Refugee Blacks feel neither hate nor jealousy toward Europeans. This /297/ may surprise one at first, for they have had to put up with cruel wars fought against them, which have left a precise memory with them; but the explanation is simple: the Boni have no hate because their life is happy, and they have no jealousy because they do not try to imitate the Europeans and are satisfied with their own civilization.

173 186 On this subject it will be noted that the Refugee Blacks recall the time of slavery without shame and without any inferiority complex; this is simply because they do not have the feeling of being the descendants of slaves; they feel themselves to be the descendants of warriors who imposed their independence by force of arms; the Djuka, exaggerating to themselves the scope of the successes won by their ancestors, even have a certain superiority complex. Proud of their ancestors, the Refugee Blacks do not feel in any way inferior to the white man and behave toward him as equal to equal.

648 [184] The Boni, like the Djuka and the Saramaka in Surinam, live under a de facto regime which is equivalent to internal autonomy. This regime was instituted for the Boni from their first contact with the French administration in 1861; it has always been associated with perfect loyalty.

The French administration, which until recent times did not have any permanent establishments in the interior of the country, has never tried to interfere with the interior functioning of the tribes which went on and still goes on according to their own law. The Refugee Blacks have thus been spared that hybrid jurisdiction, applying a customary law altered by European ideas,